

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 27, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

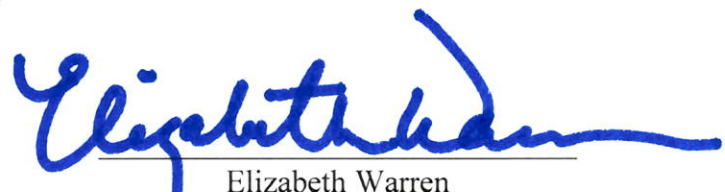
Dear Secretary Azar,

While we have been urging a rapid and proportionate response to the global spread of the novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) originating out of Wuhan, we write to express our opposition to the reported Trump administration proposal to fund the national response by transferring money out of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP helps low-income families across the country afford heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer, saving lives and saving families from housing and food insecurity as a result of high energy bills. This program is already drastically underfunded, with state energy assistance programs only able to help a fraction of those eligible.

According to LIHEAP experts, the \$37 million that the Trump administration is proposing to seize from the LIHEAP program could help 75,000 American households afford their energy bills. Low-income Americans bear the largest burden from energy bills—in winter, heating bills can cost a low-income family 25 percent of its income. Nearly 6 million families receive LIHEAP funds, depending on this resource to avoid choosing between paying their energy bill and paying for other necessities like rent, groceries, or medicine. We must appropriate the necessary funding to prepare for and respond to the spread of 2019-nCoV, but we urge you to not take any action that would threaten this life-saving, critical program and to address the 2019-nCoV crisis with new emergency funding instead.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator